

SENATE BILL REPORT

SSB 6053

As Passed Senate, March 14, 2007

Title: An act relating to studying the structure of the department of fish and wildlife.

Brief Description: Creating a legislative task force on the structure of the department of fish and wildlife.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Natural Resources, Ocean & Recreation (originally sponsored by Senators Spanel, Jacobsen, Haugen, Hargrove, Hatfield, Morton, Murray, Fairley and Kohl-Welles).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Natural Resources, Ocean & Recreation: 2/26/07, 2/28/07 [DPS, DNP].

Passed Senate: 3/14/07, 49-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES, OCEAN & RECREATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6053 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Jacobsen, Chair; Morton, Ranking Minority Member; Fraser, Hargrove, Poulsen, Spanel, Stevens and Swecker.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senator Rockefeller, Vice Chair.

Staff: Curt Gavigan (786-7437)

Background: Current law directs the Fish and Wildlife Commission (Commission) to establish policies regarding fish, including both food fish and game fish, shellfish, and wildlife species and to monitor the Department of Fish and Wildlife's implementation of those policies. Among other duties, the Commission also classifies wildlife and establishes the basic rules and regulations governing the time, place, manner, and methods used to harvest or enjoy fish and wildlife.

The Commission consists of nine members who serve six-year terms. Members are appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Senate. Three members must reside east of the summit of the Cascade mountains, three must reside west of the summit, and three are appointed at-large. No two Commissioners may be residents of the same county. Persons eligible for appointment as members of the Commission must have general knowledge of the

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habits and distribution of fish and wildlife and must not hold another state, county, or municipal elective or appointive office.

The Director of Fish and Wildlife (Director) must supervise the administration and operation of the Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) and perform duties as prescribed by law and delegated by the Commission. The Commission has the authority to appoint the Director. The Director must have general knowledge of the fisheries and wildlife resources of the state, and of its commercial and recreational fishing industry.

Prior to 1993, two separate agencies were responsible for fish and wildlife management in Washington state. The Department of Fisheries, led by a Director, was responsible for management of the state's food fish and shellfish resources. The Department of Wildlife, led by a Commission, managed the state's game fish and wildlife resources. The two agencies were merged into the Department of Fish and Wildlife 1993, and the Commission took on its current role as manager of all the state's fish and wildlife resources through Referendum 45 in 1995.

Examples of those fish classified as food fish include an array of salmon, rockfish, flounders, sole, and halibut. Examples of those fish classified as game fish include an array of bass, bullhead, and trout.

Summary of Substitute Bill: A legislative task force is created to study the structure and responsibilities of the Department.

There will be 13 voting members consisting of two members each from the House of Representatives and the Senate, and nine members from specified interested parties. Those interested parties represented include the timber industry, the farming community, the environmental community, the ranching community, the shellfish community, the sport fishing community, the commercial fishing community, the hunting community, and citizens not affiliated with such groups. There will be three non-voting members appointed by the Governor, consisting of two representatives from the Department, and one member from the Governor's Office.

The task force will review and make recommendations regarding specified aspects of the responsibilities and structure of the Department and the roles of employees, staff, and the Commission. The task force, which will be staffed by Senate and House committee staff, will report its findings and recommendations by December 1, 2007.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: Yes.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill (Natural Resources Ocean & Recreation): PRO: The issues facing the state with regards to fish populations require a changed DFW approach to pollution related issues as well as geoduck aquaculture.

CON: The Commission has been given authority over fish and wildlife by the people of the state, and this should not be altered. Reducing the role of the Commission will reduce the processes that provide public access and department accountability.

OTHER: There are serious fish and wildlife management issues that exist, but it is tough to identify and address them. Further study of the issue before action is warranted. When addressing issues relating to the Commission and Department, consumers of fish and shellfish must be considered.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Anne Mosness, Go Wild Campaign; Laura Hendricks, Henderson Bay.

CON: Terry Turner, citizen.

OTHER: Ed Owens, Coalition of Coastal Fisheries, Hunters Heritage Council, Citizens for Responsible Wildlife Management; Joe Veradoes, Puget Sound Crab Association.